

## **ABSTRACT**

A method and apparatus for intelligent packet forwarding utilizing virtual ports defined by a grouping of one or more STS-1s allocated to source and destination I/O devices (client) connected to an N x STS-1 SONET network. A data flow path for transporting the client data is established from one virtual port at the source port to another virtual port at the destination port. The data flow path is established by notifying each of the ports of the data flow path and providing to the source port an address identifying the destination port and providing to the destination port an address identifying the source port.